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Serial No. 09/513,005
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CLAIMS

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13. (Original) A method for validating messaging transactions between customers served by voice mail servers located in different geographic regions, operated by different service providers or both, the method comprising:

a. querying at least one directory in order to identify a first voice mail server associated with a caller originating a message and a second voice mail server associated with the recipient of the message; and

b. determining, based on the identities of the first and second voice mail servers, whether the message may be transferred between the first and second voice mail servers.

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14. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 13 wherein the querying step involves using the identities of the first and second voice mail servers to determine (i) their locations, (ii) the identity of the one or more service provider(s) operating the first or second voice mail server or (iii) both the locations of the first and second voice mail servers and the identity of the one or more service provider(s) operating the first or second voice mail servers.

15. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 14 wherein the querying step is performed by providing a database with at least the message recipient's telephone number correlated to at least the identities of one of the first or second voice mail services.

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16. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 14 wherein the providing step is implemented by formulating a query to the database and transmitting the query over a network.

17. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 16 wherein the determining step involves using the location of the first or second voice mail server to determine whether applicable regulatory rules allow message transactions between those locations.

18. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 15 wherein the determining step involves determining whether the message transaction may proceed if the identities of the service providers operating the first and second voice mail servers are different.

19. (Currently Amended) A process for determining the identity of a first voice mail server associated with an originating caller that has left a message with a second voice mail server associated with a receiving caller that may seek to respond to the message, the process comprising;

ascertaining an identifier associated with the originating caller;

using the identifier to determine an identity code that identifies the first VMS voice mail server and correlates with the identifier;

associating the first voice mail server's identity code with information selected from the group consisting of: the location of the first voice mail server, the identity of a first service provider operating the first voice mail server, and the existence of agreements between the first service provider and other service providers; and

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determining whether the receiving caller may communicate with the first voice mail server in response to the message.

2120. (Currently Amended) A method for validating the passage of data between customers of different companies operating messaging servers that serve different areas, the method comprising using business rules, regulatory rules or both to determine whether the data may be passed between the customers' messaging servers.

2221. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 2120 further comprising ~~the step of~~ identifying the voice mail servers involved in the passage of the data.

2322. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 2221 further comprising using the identities of the voice mail servers to determine their respective locations, their respective operating service providers or both.

2423. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 2322 further comprising ~~the step of~~ applying regulatory rules to determine whether the data may be passed between the identified voice mail servers.

2524. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 2423 further comprising ~~the step of~~ determining whether the operating service providers will accept data from one another.

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2625. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 2524 further comprising ~~the step of~~ confirming to the customer the destination of the data or message.

2726. (Currently Amended) A method according to claim 2420 further comprising the step of out-dialing a telephone call to a person not subscribing to regional messaging services in order to deliver a message.

2827. (Currently Amended) A system for validating a directory query initiated by a second subscriber served from a second messaging server that has received a message from a first subscriber served by a first messaging server and wishes to respond to the message, the system comprising:

two or more messaging servers, at least the first and second of which are (i) either located in different local access and transport areas (LATAs) ~~LATAs~~ or in different geographical regions, (ii) share a common message transfer protocol, or (iii) are operated by different service providers;

a directory that stores the identity of the two or more messaging servers and responds to an inquiry from the second messaging server by providing at least the identity of the first messaging server;

a database, associated with the directory, that specifies rules governing the exchange of data between messaging servers; and

wherein, in response to the query from the second messaging server, the directory either validates or denies the proposed message transfer between the first and second messaging server.

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2928. (Currently Amended) A method for validating messaging transactions handled by two different messaging servers comprising:

- (a) determining (i) a first identity code associated with the message initiator and (ii) a second identity code associated with the message recipient;
- (b) providing the first and second identity codes to a database; and
- (c) analyzing validation criteria associated with each of the first and second identity codes in order to determine the validity of the messaging transaction.

61 3029. (Currently Amended) The method according to claim 2928 in which the validation criteria comprise information selected from the group consisting of (1) the geographic location or regulatory status of a first messaging server that receives the message from the message initiator; (2) the geographic location or regulatory status of a second messaging server that receives the message from the first messaging server in order to forward the message to the messaging server; and (3) subscriber profile data describing whether the user initiating a selected messaging transaction and the recipient of the messaging transaction are authorized to complete the selected messaging transaction.

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3130. (Currently Amended) A validation method for use in a regional voicemail system comprising at least two different networks, the first operated by a first service provider, the second operated by a second service provider, whereby a data network couples the first and second networks to a messaging server, the method comprising:

- associating the identities of the message originator and recipient with the identities of an originating messaging server and a destination messaging server;
- comparing data describing the originating and destination voice messaging servers to determine whether voice mail may be forwarded from the originating messaging server to the destination messaging server;
- sending a validation acknowledgment to the originating messaging server that the message may be sent; and
- forwarding the voice mail to the destination messaging server upon receipt of the validation acknowledgment.